

What Factors Explain the Uneven Development of Democracy Across Asian States?

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Abstract

Democratic stability is one of the key challenges of contemporary politics. This article contributes to our understanding of this challenge by comparatively examining the sources of democratic stability and instability in India and Pakistan. The goal of this comparative case study is to analyze the main factors that affect the uneven development of democracy, evaluate how these factors can be generalized and if they can be applied to Asia as a whole. The factors examined are; decolonization, partition and independence, critical junctures affecting political parties and institutions, modernization theory, security problems and international actors. Upon examination of these factors it becomes clear that all these different components cause changes in regime outcomes and the analysis provides an explanation of why there can be an uneven development of democracy.

Key words: Democracy; decolonization; modernization; Asia, India, Pakistan

Introduction

There has been an uneven development of democracy in Asia. Most Asian countries have been colonized in the past by Western powers, all affecting the countries differently. When the colonizers left, some Asian countries were able to transition to a democratic political system, while in other countries more authoritarian forms of governance emerged. However, not many countries were able to preserve their democratic system (Gilley, 2014, p. 100-101). There are many different explanations for this uneven development and there are dispersed debates regarding what factors are the most important. This article will evaluate different factors by applying them to a case study and compare the uneven development of democracy in India and Pakistan.

This particular case study was chosen because India and Pakistan have a similar historical experience of British colonial rule and comparable socio-economic indicators. Although India is a large, diverse and still developing country, with relatively low levels of per capita income, it has managed to consolidate its democracy. Pakistan has not been able to do this despite the countries similar background. This comparison can provide insights for other Asian countries that share similar historical experiences and have low to middle income economies. The comparison between India and Pakistan shows that there are three reasons for India being more democratic than Pakistan. Firstly, the democratic framework, in particular political parties, are and have been better embedded in India (even before independence) than in the areas that became Pakistan. Secondly; India has a more diversified economy than Pakistan, which will later be connected to modernization theory. Finally; for various historical and international reasons, there is a powerful military in Pakistan, which leaves little room for democratic development.

Most of the literature involves certain factors for how India became a better democracy than Pakistan, which sets out the narrative for this article. One of the key factors that will be

examined is decolonization, which led the way for independence and resulted in a partition, affecting the democratic outcome in both India and Pakistan. Another key factor examines how this critical juncture affected political parties and institutions in India and Pakistan. The third factor that will be examined is how modernization theory can explain these outcomes. Finally, security problems and the role of international actors will be examined. The article will later analyze if these key factors that affected the development of democracy in India and Pakistan can be applied and generalized to Asia as a whole.

Defining Democracy

Before addressing the puzzle, it is important to define democracy. It is a difficult and vague concept that scholars define in different ways. What one scholar would regard as a paradigm case, another would deny was a democracy at all. Therefore, there are both thick and thin definitions of democracy. A thin definition of democracy, that only involves citizens voting in regular and competitive elections, could describe countries as developed democracies. On the contrary, the same countries might not meet the criteria necessary to be recognized as a democracy, if a thick definition is applied. A thick definition involves a wider range of political conditions. For example, there are no restrictions on citizens expression and political parties compete on a relatively even playing field. (Karl, 1990, p. 1-2). Therefore, a thin definition defines democracy as simply having regular competitive elections but excludes the fact that these elections might not be fair, which a thick definition involves.

In this article, democracy will be defined through the work of Adam Przeworski (1991) and Joseph Schumpeter (2003). Schumpeter argues that, “the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote” (2003, p. 269). A simpler

definition of democracy would be through the work of Przeworski, where he argues that “Democracy is a system in which parties lose elections” (1991, p. 10). Meaning that, if there are different parties within a country and they lose elections it is because the people are able to vote and influence which political party is in power. To get a greater understanding on the subject, it is not only necessary to understand democracy but also what makes a democracy consolidate. This article is in accordance with Jeffery Haynes’ conceptualization of democracy consolidation. Haynes argue that “*Democratic consolidation* is the process of embedding both democratic institutions and perceptions among both elites and citizens that democracy is the best way of ‘doing’ politics” (2013, p. 126).

Decolonization, Independence and Partition

To be able to analyze how independence and partition affected India and Pakistan differently, it is essential to know the historical background. The British crown ruled India for almost a hundred years and this rule was called the ‘The British Raj’ (Jalal, 1995, p. 11). Ayesha Jalal argues that there has always been a religious mistrust in India, which existed before the British arrived, but it was something the British worsened by putting majorities and minorities against each other (1995, p. 11). On one side there are the Hindus and Sikhs and on the other side there are the Muslims. T. V. Paul argues that when the British decided to leave India, many Muslims began to fear that they would have to live in a democracy under a Hindu-majority, and that way they would be underrepresented (2015, p. 6). Therefore, Indian politicians, such as Muhammad Ali Jinnah from the Muslim League, brought up the idea that there should be a separate Muslim state (Jalal, 1995, p. 14). On the other hand, many Hindus were upset that the Muslims wanted to break up the country. All this anger resulted in violence across the country with mass killings (Paul, 2015, p. 7). In 1947 the British left and divided the country into India and Pakistan. India was established

as a secular nation with a majority Hindu and Sikh population (Paul, 2015, p. 7). India becoming secular means that the constitution is not based on explicitly religious principles. This is one of the reasons for India achieving a consolidated democracy. Since they became a secular nation, India established a political system in which most groups felt that they were being represented (Adeney & Wyatt, 2004 p. 8). Pakistan was established as an Islamic nation with primarily a Muslim population (Paul, 2015, p. 7). Before the British left they drew the borders of India and Pakistan and when these were established, it led to mass migration; the Muslims wanted to go over the border to Pakistan and the Hindus and Sikhs wanted to cross over to India. However, the result was a disaster with violence breaking out on both sides of the border with mass murder and killings (Paul, 2015, p. 7). The first problem for Pakistan came with partition because this was the point when institutions, parties, pluralism and democracy should have been consolidated. This was an extremely hard task for the state since it all had to be consolidated from scratch, something the country failed to do.

Critical juncture, Institutions and Parties

Across India, there has been a consolidated democracy. Even though India has not been able to eliminate poverty or reduce inequalities, it is still largely accepted as one of the most successful democracies in Asia (Adeney & Wyatt, 2004). One of the key events that paved the way for governmental change in India and Pakistan was decolonization. An event like this can be described as a critical juncture. Katharine Adeney and Andrew Wyatt define a critical juncture as political context, in which

“There are periods of political openness when institutions are malleable, and individuals, or individuals acting collectively, are able to reshape them. Structural and institutional change is more likely during these ‘critical junctures’” (2004, p. 7).

The most apparent critical juncture in Asia has been decolonization. However, this critical juncture affected the democratic framework, in particular political parties, differently in India and Pakistan.

Adeney and Wyatt argue that political parties in India were embedded in institutions before the British left. When independence came in 1947, India already had the necessary structures that made transition to democracy easier, which is one of the reasons for their consolidated democracy (2004, p. 8). An example of this would be the Indian National Congress, it managed to create compromise between elites, thus, reducing conflicts. Additionally, it had a structure, which encouraged pluralism and created a working link between the state and society (Adeney & Wyatt, 2004). Although India is a heterogeneous state, the Indian National Congress has been able to manage the ethnic diversity; firstly, through recognition and secondly, through subdividing the Hindu majority through region, language and caste. This ensured that there was no ethnic group that could undermine the Congress' primacy (Adeney & Wyatt, 2004, p. 10).

On the contrary, Pakistan has experienced periods of democracy but they never managed to consolidate it. It is clear that Pakistan has not been able to achieve a persistent democracy compared to India (Adeney & Wyatt, 2004). One of the reasons for this is that there was no institutionalized party in Pakistan, that was able to create a link between society and the state since independence. The Muslim League remained elite-dominated and there was an existing disagreement, which prevented them from creating a unified party (Adeney & Wyatt, 2004, p. 11-12). Adeney and Wyatt argue that the elite were more concerned about strengthening their position rather than creating a national unity in Pakistan. As a result, political parties were not able to create a working political program. Pakistan also failed to apply a specific structure regarding ethnic diversity the way India did (2004, p. 11-12). The majority of the population in Pakistan, the Bengalis, were not represented in any of the sectors. Instead, Punjabis were dominant in many of the different sectors and they did not have a positive approach to democracy, since a democracy would marginalize them as a minority and they would lose their power (Adeney & Wyatt, 2004,

p. 11-12). This occurred because the critical juncture was too long. This spread disunity and produced an evident institutional weakness that left vacuums to fill for other institutions, such as the army and bureaucracy, which were dominated by a minority.

Modernization Theory

Economic development is a factor that is often discussed in regard to the development of democracy in a country. Terry Karl argues that there are several preconditions for democracy and one of those is that there must be a certain level of wealth or degree of capitalist development (1990, p. 3). India has slowly started to develop into a more open-market orientated economy, by introducing several reforms over the last two decades, increasing the rates of economic growth (Kohli, 2004). India has a very diverse economy, which is mainly built around their agricultural sector but today, services and industries have become a major source of their economic growth (Kohli, 2004). When examining India, the country started to modernize during the period of colonial rule and when the British left, they already had working institutions, policies and political parties. If a state has a more modernized and diverse economy, there will be an increasingly stable middle-class, which is the class that tends to join and mobilize political parties. Therefore, it can be argued that India's economic development has played a significant role in the consolidation of their democracy.

On the contrary, Pakistan has had a much slower economic growth rate than India, which can be seen as one of the factors regarding their inability to consolidate their democracy. Pakistan has had decades of internal political disputes and has not been able to develop a consensus for the governance agenda or a long-term economic strategy, which has slowed down their economic growth rate (Hasan, 2015). The modernization theory would then argue that because of Pakistan's low economic growth, the country has not been able to create or mobilize political parties. It is

clear that India is much more industrialized and has higher levels of service industry than Pakistan, which results in a higher level of wealth. According to the modernization theory and Karl (1990, p. 3), this could be one of the factors, which explains the uneven development of democracy in India and Pakistan.

Security Problems and the Role of International Actors

International actors can be a key factor for the democratic outcome in a state, depending on what kind of support the state receives. Maya Tudor argues that, “Democratization scholars have long suggested that international support for regimes can be an important influence on whether or not states democratize” (2013, p. 31). When examining American support for military regimes in Pakistan, it is evident that this type of support has further established anti-democratic forces in Pakistan (Tudor, 2013, p. 31). These alliances were not established until a few years after Pakistan became independent and by that time, Pakistan had already failed to provide a stable regime (Tudor, 2013, p. 31). This does not necessarily imply that American support influenced the political outcomes of Pakistan. However, their support did in fact strengthen pre-existing authoritarian tendencies (Tudor, 2013, p. 31). It was clear that the priority was to uphold these relationships rather than trying to develop and enforce democracy in Pakistan.

Another factor linked to the role of international actors is that since partition, Pakistan has seen India as a threat. After partition, Pakistan was immediately involved in a military conflict with its militarily stronger neighbor India. This resulted in Pakistan feeling weaker and threatened by India (Tudor, 2013, p. 32). Therefore, Pakistan tried to increase their security in the international system by making government spending on their military a priority (Tudor, 2013, p. 32). As the military became stronger, it also becomes harder to create political parties and for them to mobilize. This can further be connected to the modernization theory. Since Pakistan decided to

focus their state finances on the military, there was not much left for other necessary investments in the country. This led to a lower degree of development in the country, thus, explaining the uneven development of democracy.

Application of Factors to Asia as a Whole

The factors that have been applied to India and Pakistan can be generalized and applied to Asia as a whole. Not every Asian country has experienced critical junctures such as decolonization and independence. However, these countries have experienced periods where politics is more malleable. For example, the civil war in China can be seen as a critical juncture because it led the way for a new regime and the communist party (Collins & Cottey, 2012, p. 5). The direction this change takes depends on the institutions and parties that are present at that time. There is a consensus in the literature that Asian states with weakly institutionalized parties have found the transition to democracy more difficult (Adeney & Wyatt, 2004, p. 8). If political vacuums emerge, it is important that a country has these parties that are institutionally embedded, otherwise it leaves room for undemocratic forces, which is what happened in Pakistan (Adeney & Wyatt, 2004, p. 8). Furthermore, most parties in Asian countries have had to reach compromises with undemocratic classes, but not every party has been able to go beyond the undemocratic preferences of these classes (Adeney & Wyatt, 2004, p. 8).

The second factor, modernization theory, argue that a higher level of wealth in a country promotes democracy, which is the case for India. However, the theory is not applicable to all Asian countries and there are exceptions. China is one of the biggest economies but it is not democratic. Although it is important to remember that China did not experience the same critical juncture as many other Asian countries, instead it was a civil war, which showed the way for a developmental autocracy. The modernization theory, however, is applicable to many other Asian countries even

if there are exceptions such as China, it is still a relevant factor. Japan is also one of the biggest economies and it has a higher degree of democracy, which further proves the modernization theory is a significant factor.

International actors and security can also explain the uneven development of democracy across Asian states, since other countries can strengthen or weaken actors that promote or subvert democracy in a country (Tudor, 2013, p. 31). Examples of these influences have been in Pakistan where America kept on supporting their military and strengthening that regime type. On the contrary, American influence forced Japan to turn into a more democratic-style nation. If America would not have supported the Pakistani military like it did, it might not have been as embedded in the nation as it is. Also, Pakistan chose to focus on the military since they felt weaker than other countries in the international system, which created undemocratic features.

Conclusion

This article has examined different factors that explain the uneven development of democracy across Asian states. To understand these different factors, they have been applied to India and Pakistan. It reached the conclusion that the most important factors would be different types of critical junctures, when there is an increase in political openness and institutions are more malleable. Across Asia, this critical juncture has been decolonization. This factor is also linked to the countries institutions and parties, both playing a crucial role regarding democratization in a country. If there is a political vacuum during these critical junctures and non-working institutions, it leads the way for undemocratic forces. The modernization theory has also helped us understand the uneven development of democracy since it shows that countries with a higher level of wealth tend to become more democratic, even though there are exceptions. The last factor examined is security and international actors. Countries that want to increase their security tend to look for

support to increase their military power, something America provided Pakistan with, which strengthened their non-democratic forces. However, if America would have acted the way they did with Japan, forcing them to introduce a more democratic-style it could have affected Pakistan differently. “In all of these ways, democracy represents both change and continuity in Asian politics” (Gilley, 2014, p. 141).

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